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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000599

SENSITIVE  
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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [EINV](#) [KJUS](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: ROAD RAGE ATTACK ON DUTCH BUSINESSMEN EMBLEMATIC  
OF GROWING CONCERN

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¶1. (SBU) BUSINESSMEN ASSAULTED: On Saturday, July 12, two pedestrians, Hans Boon and Jurgan Dolstra -- Dutch nationals who are senior executives of the semi-privatized postal corporation Haypost -- were attacked and beaten by two motorists in a road rage incident. The incident occurred at about 10:30 pm. The two Dutch businessmen were crossing a major downtown Yerevan thoroughfare when a speeding car passed in front of them so closely as to nearly run them down. Boon later told police that the car passed so closely in front of him that he was forced to jump violently backward to avoid being struck, and he believes he may have inadvertently kicked the side of the car in the process. The motorists, apparently believing that one of the two men had deliberately kicked the vehicle as it passed, returned and attacked Boon and Dolstra -- punching both men in the face, and reportedly kicking Boon repeatedly in the torso as he lay on the ground. The two victims were hospitalized for two nights. The two attackers, identified by police as Samvel Edwardi Hovhannissian and Yuri Igori Ohanian, were estimated by Boon and Dolstra to be in their late twenties. Boon is 52 years old, and Dolstra is 48. Hovhannissian and Ohanian's initial claim that Boon and Dolstra attacked them first seems implausible, given the age disparity between the two sides. Embassies know the two victims socially, though not closely, and would not expect either to start a fight. Hovhannissian and Ohanian are free pending trial on charges of "hooliganism," with a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment.

¶2. (SBU) WOE TO THE VICTIM: Authorities' response to the incident left much to be desired. The entire incident happened within sight of a group of police officers. All four men were taken together (with victims and attackers crammed side by side in one van) to the main downtown police station (Kentron district), where all four were required to sit together for hours awaiting police processing. Boon and Dolstra received no medical care for their injuries, police were unable to communicate with them in either Dutch or English, and police refused to allow them to place any calls from their cellular telephones. Boon finally was able to call one of his senior Haypost aides, who finally reached one of the top officials of the Ministry of Transport and Communication -- Haypost's regular government partner -- to intercede with police on Boon and Dolstra's behalf. A Haypost employee also came to the police station to interpret for the Dutch executives. A call to the police station by the Transport and Communication minister (or possibly a deputy, this is unclear) finally thawed the semi-hostile, uncommunicative, and uncooperative attitude shown by police; the two men were able to give their statements through the interpreter and an ambulance was called to take them to the hospital for medical treatment. The two attackers had been let go earlier, under the pretense that the police station was "closed" for the weekend and there was no way to arrest, charge, or hold them until Monday morning. The defendants

were later summoned back to the police station on Tuesday, July 15, charged and released pending trial.

¶3. (SBU) DIP CORPS RESPONDS: Boon reported the incident to the (non-resident) Dutch Ambassador, coincidentally in Yerevan at the time, who raised the case during his meeting with the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, news of the attack spread quickly around Yerevan's small expatriate community, and became the talk of the diplomatic corps, many of whom expressed concerns to various GOAM officials. Polchief, joined by the French DCM, took an opportunity at the French Bastille Day reception to raise the issue with the international cooperation director of the Prosecutor General's office, who duly provided a follow-up report from the city prosecutor. These inquiries, as well as Haypost's political connections, seem to have ensured some law enforcement follow-up, after police initially seemed to take the Armenian attackers' side over that of the foreigners.

¶4. (SBU) A WORRISOME TREND?: We have had a growing perception in recent months of an elevated risk of road rage-type incidents, despite the fact that Armenia remains overall a relatively quite safe place for expatriates. A sizeable minority of Armenian drivers are habitually quite aggressive and erratic in their driving habits, and may engage fellow drivers and pedestrians in machismo-laden tests of will, which can escalate into physical violence. Another incident not long ago involved an embassy security officer, in a diplomatic-plated vehicle. The emboff reflexively sounded his horn when another vehicle swerved in front of him at high speed. Angered by the horn, at the next stoplight, the offending driver jumped out of his car and came to confront the emboff, attempting to open emboff's locked car door. Press accounts periodically detail road rage-type incidents when they involved prominent political or crime

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figures or their bodyguards, and post hears privately of additional such incidents that never make the papers. One such unpublished example reported to polchief by a media representative involved a road rage confrontation between a police captain and an oligarch's bodyguards, in which the lone police officer was reportedly beaten up by the thugs after a traffic incident. That incident was allegedly mediated politically, without recourse to law enforcement action. In another case, AmCit tourists in a hired taxi had their vehicle clipped by a speeding Mercedes, whose occupants then vented their pique by beating the elderly taxi driver and threatening the AmCits. In another incident, an AmCit bicyclist had a vodka bottle thrown at his head by the drunken occupants of a passing car, when he declined to join them for a drink.

¶5. (SBU) Post intends to work with CA on the possibility of including a statement in the Consular Information Sheet urging American citizens to be careful of road rage incidents. Post also will remind AmCits about the need for proper car insurance, in the wake of a separate incident of an uninsured AmCit being sued following an accident.

PENNINGTON